

Discover culture, entertainment, and fun in and around the capital city.

By Sally Campbell Grout

In some places, you're over promising if you say you have "something for everyone." But not in Central Indiana. Here, just about any requirement for fun can be filled: shows, shopping, museums, sports, restaurants, historic sites...you name it, you'll find it in Indianapolis and its surrounding communities.

Put the diet on hold.

Whether your Central Indiana getaway lasts a week, a couple of days, or just a few hours, you have to promise yourself that it's going to include trying a new restaurant. (You can spend some extra time on the treadmill later.) But where do you find those one-of-a-kind dining destinations? One source is through a group called "Indianapolis Originals" (www.indianapolisoriginals.com). Each restaurant in this organization of nearly 40 independent dining establishments has a unique menu, but they all share a common goal: to please both the local crowd and out-of-town guests with excellent service, a welcoming atmosphere, and the skills of master chefs. Here are just a few of the restaurants you'll find on the list: Café Nora (317-571-1000), which serves Southern European cuisine in an elegant setting; Milano Inn (317-264-3585), an Indianapolis favorite for Italian food since 1934; and the Corner Wine Bar (317-255-5159), where the menu is complemented by a list of more than 150 wines and champagnes.

You'll find charming restaurants outside the city limits, too. A few examples: In Danville, the Mayberry Café (317-745-4067) pays tribute to one of our favorite TV hometowns with offerings such as Aunt Bee's Fried Chicken. In Sheridan, the tenderloin sandwiches at the Red Onion (317-758-0424) are so big, they practically eclipse the plate. And while it's not actually a restaurant, David Alan Chocolatier in Lebanon (800-428-2310) may inspire you to have truffles for dinner.

Great strolls.

Indianapolis is a great city to see on foot. Several tours offered by Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana from May through October (800-450-4534) can guide you to some particularly interesting spots. Tours are scheduled for Fridays and Saturdays. Themes include art & history, hidden treasures, elegance restored, and retro revival, among others.

For more Indianapolis history explore the Fountain Square Historic District (fountainsquareindy.com). Located at Village Avenue, Prospect Street, and Shelby Street, Fountain Square has restaurants, galleries,

nightclubs, antique malls, an old-fashioned diner, and even duck pin bowling.

In Indianapolis, the men and women who have served this country are honored at several destinations. Indiana War Memorials Parks and Monuments (317-232-7615) can guide you to these world-renowned memorials, which are located on five blocks of parklands, plus a 28,000 square foot museum detailing the history of Hoosiers' service.

Two memorials, those honoring the USS Indianapolis and America's Congressional Medal of Honor recipients, are located along the city's downtown canal. But as you take this outdoor walk, you'll find some destinations beckoning you inside. At the NCAA Hall of Champions (800-735-6222), learn about experiences of 360,000 student athletes through exhibits and movie presentations. Get to know the animals at the 64-acre Indianapolis Zoo (317-630-2001) and explore the greenhouse and gardens at the adjacent White River Gardens (317-630-2001). The Indiana State Museum (317-232-1637) has three floors of incredible exhibits covering Indiana art, science, and culture. And the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art (317-636-WEST) is the only museum in the Midwest devoted to Native American and Western art, history, and culture.

Not many cities talk about their cemeteries as destinations, but Indianapolis has a great one worth exploring: Crown Hill Cemetery (800-809-3366) was dedicated in 1864, and today it's one of Indiana's most historically significant sites. Among the 185,000 citizens buried here are the famous and infamous, including President Benjamin Harrison, Colonel Eli Lilly, and John Dillinger. Scheduled tours, such as Cemetery Art and Architecture at Crown Hill, Crown Hill's Actors, Artists, Architects, and Musicians, and Civil War Tour can lead you to some interesting spots. "The Crown," which is the highest hill in Marion County, is the final resting place of beloved Hoosier poet James Whitcomb Riley.

You can learn more about Riley at the James Whitcomb Riley Museum Home in Indianapolis (317-631-5885). At this preserved 1872 Italianate home in Lockerbie Square, Riley lived the last 23 years of his life. The Riley Home Complex in Greenfield (317-462-8539) is Riley's birth home, and memorabilia from his life is on display here. Greenfield's Riley Festival (317-462-2141), which takes place October 6-9, 2005, is a four-day celebration of his life with home arts, quilts, fine arts, photography, parades, entertainment, craft booths, a car show, antiques, and an 1840s encampment.

Kid-friendly fall fun.

Central Indiana is filled with places for kids to have fun. And during the Halloween season, they're more exciting (and slightly more spine tingling!) than ever. Any time you visit the Indian camp, pioneer village, Victorian farm, covered bridge, discovery area, and historic house at Conner Prairie Living History Museum in Fishers (800-966-1836), you'll really come away with a sense of what life was like in the 1880s. Visit October 19-23 or 26-30, 2005, and you'll come away with something else: the heebie geebies! That's when the Headless Horseman makes his Conner Prairie ride. Activities during the event include a haunted hayride, storytelling, food, a puppet show, Halloween games, seasonal kids' crafts, and more. (Little ones can enjoy a scare-free hayride.)

The Indianapolis Zoo invites you to Halloween ZooBoo (317-630-2001) October 20-23, 2005. Your princesses, superheroes, and little ghosts can enjoy trick-or-treating, a not-so-scary animal show, a birds of prey show, a batty bounce house, and a haunted train ride.

The Children's Museum of Indianapolis (800-208-KIDS) has floor after floor of interactive fun. Permanent exhibits where little hands and minds can explore include "Scienceworks," "Passport to the World," and "Dinosphere: Now You're in Their World." During the Children's Museum Guild's Annual Haunted House October 14-31, 2005 (317-334-3322), you can tour during friendly (with lights on, for little ones) or frightening (for braver, bigger kids) hours. This year's theme: "Camp Creepy." Another temporary exhibit, "Rockwell's America: Celebrating the Art of Norman Rockwell" will be at the museum until January 16, 2006. This heart-warming exhibit is popular not only with kids, but with parents and grandparents as well.

At Waterman's Farm Market (317-356-6995) in Indianapolis, you can purchase fresh-picked produce or pick your own. Crops, which include a variety of fruits and vegetables, are available from late May through Thanksgiving. Kids are welcome in the fields, which makes this a great family experience. During the entire month of October, celebrate the season at the Fall Harvest Festival. Take a tractor-drawn hayride to the pumpkin patch, explore the three cornstalk and straw bale mazes, and enjoy dozens of other activities.

Shop, shop, and shop. Then shop some more.

Of course, you can't take a tour of Indiana's biggest city without visiting two of its most talked about malls: Circle Centre (317-681-8000), located downtown, offers shoppers more than 100 stores and restaurants, including anchors Nordstrom and Parisian. On the city's northeast side, The Fashion Mall at Keystone (317-574-4000) is home to more than 90 stores and restaurants, including Saks Fifth Avenue, Restoration Hardware, and (coming in the fall of 2005) Crate and Barrel.

Out of the city limits to explore more one-of-a-kind destinations. Carmel's Clay Terrace (317-566-0011) is unique because it's an "unenclosed" mall. Here, you'll find a mix of nationally known stores and Central Indiana exclusives. In Morgantown, you'll find lots of charming shops that seem to have something special in every corner. Among the Morgantown Merchants (812-597-5648) you'll find antiques, collectibles, yarn, spinning wheels, fabric, clocks, home décor, and more. Arcadia Antiques & Café (317-984-7107) offers quality antiques, such as furniture, vintage jewelry, and quilts in a beautiful historic building; the café serves breakfast, lunch, coffees, and desserts. It's pretty obvious what you'll see at Strawtown Pottery in Noblesville (317-984-5080). But along with hand-thrown stoneware, you'll find pottery accessories, gifts, and antiques.

See it all in style.

Here's a Central Indiana offering that defies being categorized: IndyWest Harley-Davidson Rentals in Plainfield (317-279-0062). Visit Indiana's only authorized Harley-Davidson rental dealership to see how cool you can look.

For more fun in Central Indiana, and around it, visit enjoyindiana.com.